

DESCRIPTION

Method and system for operating a dental chair connected to a computer

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TECHNICAL FIELD

The invention relates to method and system for the operation of a dental chair connected to a computer (PC).

10 The integration of a computer-controlled PC monitor in dental treatment areas enabling the display of PC applications at the chairside usually entails operation of the installed computer from a position near the dental chair.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

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The use of conventional PC peripheral input devices, *eg*, a mouse or keyboard, is not ergonomic for hygienic and handling reasons. For this reason, operations such as un-
parking and parking of a video camera integrated in the dental chair or the actuation of
footswitches associated with this application are transmitted via a computer interface of
20 the dental chair to a computer interface of the computer, where they initiate certain pre-
programmed functions in PC applications when the latter are running and are designed to
carry out such functions.

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Thus images, for example, of the oral cavity of a patient, which are created by a video
camera and displayed on a monitor of the computer are transmitted via an interface in
the patient's chair to the computer on account of commands issuing from a footswitch
connected to the patient's chair, which commands cause a corresponding storage com-
mand to be carried out within the application.

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Other operations of the PC application are only possible by way of standard input de-
vices of the PC, usually the keyboard and mouse.

US 5,961,610 discloses a medical image projection system, which exhibits the possibility of programmability. Among other features, it is possible to display a number of images in a single area without overlapping. And it is possible to write a script in a window to influence the order of program events. This script is to be regarded as a small independent program, which can be checked for proper running in a debugger. The assignment of the function keys is not itself explained, so that it may be assumed that in the prior art it is achieved by fixed programming.

It is an object of the invention to provide a method and system making it possible to effect efficient control of a computer connected to a dental chair.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

This object is achieved by a system and method comprising the features defined in the independent claims. The sub-claims refer to further embodiments of the invention.

A system for operating a dental chair connected to a computer, comprising actuating elements and/or status indicators disposed on the dental chair, and comprising a computer interface, via which information is transmitted in the form of function codes to the computer by way of the actuating elements and/or status indicators on the dental chair, and comprising a storage area in the computer in which actions assigned to one or more function codes are stored, is characterized in that software is installed on the computer which is capable of managing these function codes and by means of which the action assigned to the function codes in a saved configuration file is initiated, *ie* a PC application is opened or closed or an operation is carried out in a running PC application, and that the assignment of function codes associated with the actuating elements and/or status indicators on the dental chair to the PC actions can be configured by modifying the configuration file.

Due to the given freedom of programmability, the computer interface can be utilized by other PC applications within the scope of the commands available therein. When there is a change in the PC application used, the action assigned to the function codes also

changes, for example by cueing a corresponding configuration file in which the new assignments are saved.

5 According to a further embodiment, the software has a dialog box by means of which the assignment can be specified by the user.

10 According to a further embodiment, the assignment of the actuating element is dependent on the currently active PC application. Furthermore, the actuating element concerned can be assigned to different actions in different PC applications.

The computer interface is advantageously designed such that information on the assignment of the actuating element can be transmitted from the computer to the dental chair and can be made perceptible on the control panel.

15 A method of controlling a dental chair connected to a computer comprises the steps of actuating an actuating element located on the dental chair and/or activating a status indicator and generating information thereon at the dental chair, transmitting said information in the form of one or more function codes from the dental chair to the computer, comparing the information in the form of one or more function codes with a configuration file in a storage area in the computer and carrying out the action assigned to said information as stored in a configuration file, and is characterized in that the comparison of the information is taken over by software which is designed to manage said assignment and is independent of the PC applications used, which software causes the said action to be carried out, namely opening or closing of a PC application and/or execution of an operation in a running PC application, and that the software is configured by modifying the configuration file via a dialog box, in which the assignment of function codes of the actuating elements and/or status indicator on the dental chair to the action is specified.

30 Advantageously, the software is adapted to make it possible to store more than one configuration. Furthermore, the action assigned to the actuating element can be dependent on the currently active PC application. According to a further embodiment, the actuating element concerned has different action assignments for different PC applications.

Advantageously, the assignments are displayed on the control panel of the dental appliance. The PC context returned through the computer interface may be displayable, or an application-specific control panel may be shown.

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The invention makes it possible to establish a user-configured assignment of operations carried out at the chairside, or of defined changes of status of the dental chair, to certain PC functions. The existing control panel of the dental chair is utilized here for the control of the various PC applications.

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The layout of the control panel of the dental chair can be governed by the status of the PC, *ie* is dependent on which PC application is running, or it may be directly controlled by the PC application itself.

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Thus the user is in a position to effect chairside operation and individual configuration of the PC applications used, or even other functions used in the PC network, without the aid of standard PC input devices. Furthermore, the fact that the means for controlling the PC, as are dependent on the PC application used, are displayed on the control panel of the dental chair results in a high operational potential. From the point of view of the user, the operation of the dental appliance and the PC (internally/externally) merge together, combined with the ergonomic operational benefits of the dental chair.

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On the one hand the dental chairs are configured in relation to the PC function, whilst on the other hand the control panel of the dental chair can be designed for configuration of PC control means depending on the PC application.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

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The invention is explained below in greater detail with reference to an embodiment illustrated diagrammatically in the drawing. In the drawings,

Fig. 1 shows the functional components of a system of the invention and

Fig. 2 shows a dental operating chair exhibiting further components of the system.

WORKING EXAMPLE

Fig. 1 shows the functional components of a dental chair 1 equipped with a computer 2. Actuating elements or state transitions defined as function keys 3 of a dental chair 1 are transmitted, on activation, as a function code 4 to the PC 2 via computer interfaces 5, 6.

Software managing the computer interfaces starts an action assigned to this function code in a configuration file 7 stored in a storage area in the computer 2, *eg*, it opens or closes a PC application 8, 9, 10 or initiates some operation in a running PC application.

By means of a dialog box the user can configure the assignment of the function codes of the actuating elements of the dental appliance to certain PC actions.

The assignment of the function keys 3 may be governed by the currently active PC application, *ie* the actuating elements concerned have different action assignments for different PC applications, to which end information 11 is transmitted via the computer interfaces 6, 5 of the computer 2 to the dental chair 1.

The assignments are displayed, and the PC context returned via the computer interface is indicated according to the design of the control panel 12 of the dental appliance. Furthermore, an application-specific control panel may be displayed.

The PC software managing the interfaces registers the PC context, *ie* it recognizes the currently active application and relevant changes in the application used. This recognition can be effected, for example, by mechanisms of the PC operating system or alternatively by notification from the currently active application to the PC software. The definition as to which changes of context will specify what function assignments will be allocated to the control panel 12 of the dental chair 1 is a component of the configuration file. New assignments of function codes to PC actions when there is a change in context will be established as specified in the configuration.

Furthermore, the PC context or the function assignment of individual actuating elements 3 can be displayed by conventional display units, but preferably graphically on the control panel 12 of the dental chair. The graphical content of the displays can likewise be allocated in the configuration file, and this information 11 can, when required, be loaded
5 into the dental chair 1 via the computer interface 5, 6, where it is displayed in the control panel 12. For this purpose there is provided a unidirectional signal connection 13.

By the term "control panel" we mean any arrangement which imparts information concerning the operation and status of the dental chair or of the PC and, in particular, makes
10 such information perceptible by display means.

Instead of function keys, an additional switching element, such as a footswitch, can initiate the transmission of function codes to the computer, as may also the recognition of the removal of an instrument intended to be regarded as an indication of state transition.
15 The actuating elements can be integrated in the control panel and cooperate with the computer interface through signal lines 14, 15.

The dental unit may also have its own storage area, the content of which can be modified via the configuration file of the computer and which cooperates with the control panel 12
20 and the actuating elements 3.

Fig. 2 illustrates a dental operating chair 1 having further components of the system. Thus there are shown an actuating element 3 connected to the dental chair and having a number of keys and displays 12, and a computer 2 having an input keyboard 18 and a
25 monitor 12' connected to the computer so as to display a PC application. Instruments 17 can be controlled by means of a footswitch 16 connected to the dental chair 1.

The method can be set down in the form of a software program as defined in any one or more of the following method claims. A data medium can contain a data structure that is
30 capable of running on a computer to realized a process as defined in one or more of the following method claims.

The following table gives examples of function codes for PC functions as generated in the dental chair and depending on the status of the dental chair:

Status of the dental chair	PC function controlled
Chair moves to investigating position	Patient is logged into the software supporting the treatment, and the display shows the history of treatment and planned treatment
Chair moves to get-out position	Patient is logged out from the software supporting the treatment, opened patient-dependent data or images are closed
Chair moves to pause position (for interrupted treatment)	Software for information for the patient or for entertainment (video, TV) is started
Chair leaves pause position	Software for information for the patient or for entertainment is stopped
Diverse positions of the chair, unparking and parking of instruments, state of regeneration	Control of an on-line help menu or of operating instructions (tutorial), synchronized by system states of the dental chair
Error state of the dental chair	System status of the dental chair including service information are read and sent by email or fax to a preset address for remote diagnosis
Actuation of commutator switch and pedal of footswitch (dental chair)	Navigation and activation of a function in the currently active PC application
Actuation of keys in control panel of dental chair	Activation of any desired functions of currently active application or change in the application to be used

- 5 From the dental chair state transitions are transmitted in the form of function codes irrespective of the status of the PC. Software for the computer interface running on the PC detects the PC context, *ie* the currently active application, and switches the function configured for said application.

The PC context and also the assigned functions are indicated in the control panel of the dental chair preferably by means of application-specified symbols.